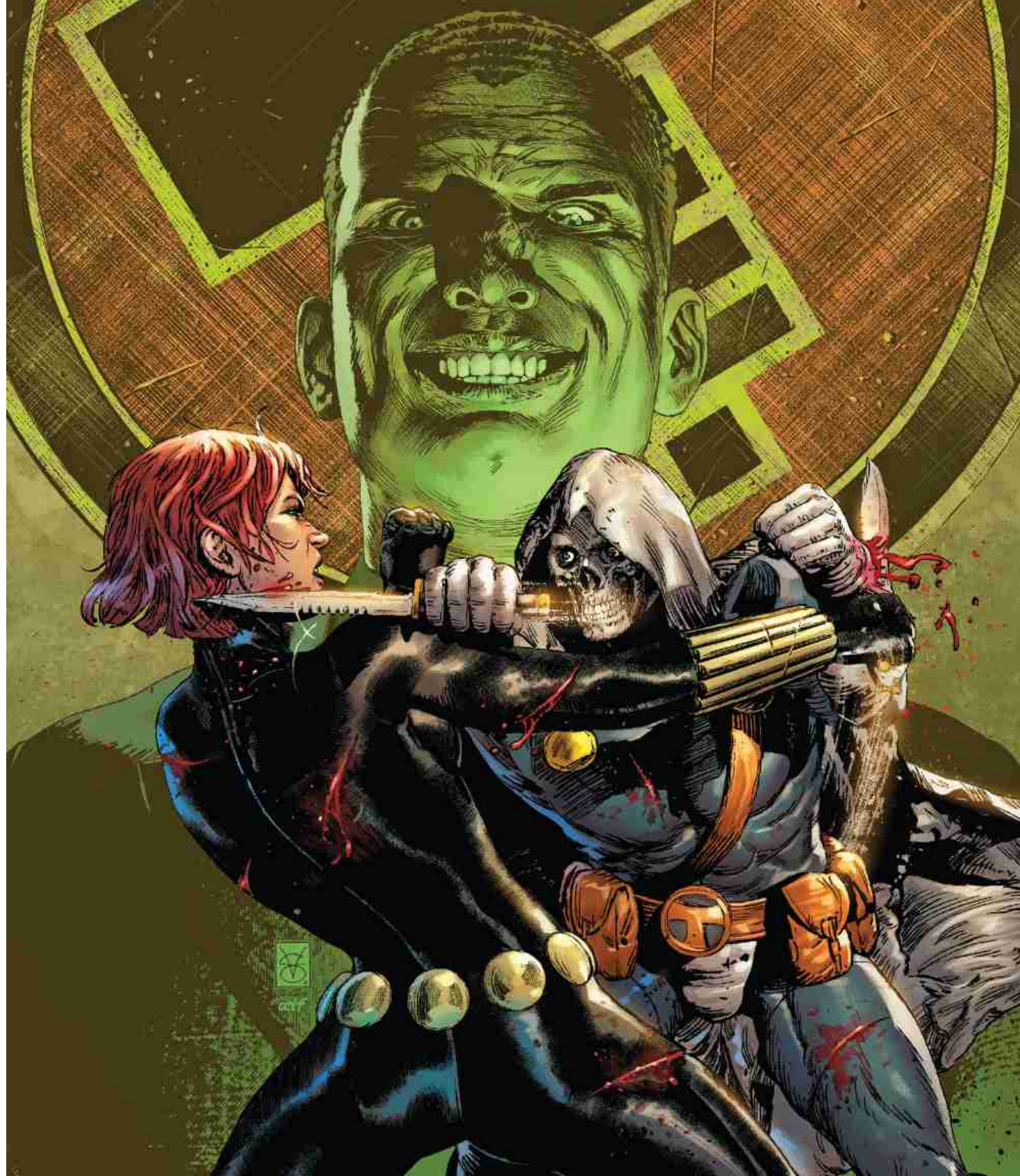


MARVEL

5

MacKAY
VITTI
GURU-eFX

TASKMASTER



Using innate photographic reflexes, Tony Masters is able to replicate any action he witnesses, no matter the complexity. Using these skills, combined with an arsenal of deadly facsimile weapons, he operates as a henchmen trainer and mercenary for hire known throughout the underworld as...

TASKMASTER

"THE RUBICON TRIGGER"

PART FIVE

MARIA HILL is dead, and the entire world thinks Taskmaster did it. He's innocent for once, but that's irrelevant. The BLACK WIDOW is already on his trail, and she won't be the only one.

One man believes Tony: former S.H.I.E.L.D. Director NICK FURY. He's willing to help, but he wants something in return. Before she died, Hill was working on something called RUBICON TRIGGER, an old H.A.M.M.E.R. project. To access it, Fury needs the kinesic signatures of Squadron Supreme Director PHIL COULSON, Agents of Wakanda Director OKOYE and South Korea's N.I.S. Tiger Division Director AMI HAN.

Taskmaster has secured all three signatures. Now he just has to find and crack Rubicon Trigger - before the Black Widow finds him. But Tony's got the strangest feeling that someone's trying to screw him...

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MacKAY**
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EDITOR IN CHIEF

BEEN A LONG
ROAD TO
GET HERE.

FIGHTING ALL
OVER THE WORLD.
ALMOST DIED A
FEW TIMES. BUT
NOW WE'RE READY.

ME AND NICK FURY,
WE'RE GOING TO FIND
OUT WHAT RUBICON
TRIGGER IS.

WE'RE GOING
TO FIND OUT
WHY MARIA
HILL DIED.

WE'RE GOING TO
FIND OUT WHO
FRAMED ME FOR
HER MURDER.

BEEN A LONG
ROAD. BUT I
MADE IT.

TASKMASTER,
BABY. DON'T BET
AGAINST ME.

WE DON'T TALK
AS WE GET OFF
THE PLANE.



WE BOTH KNOW
WE'RE ALMOST
AT THE END OF
THIS THING.



IT'S THAT CHRISTMAS
MORNING FEELING--WHEN
YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR
SOMETHING SO LONG, IT
FELT LIKE YOU'D NEVER
MAKE IT THERE.

AND THEN, ALL OF
A SUDDEN, IT'S
THERE. IT'S TIME.

ALL THAT'S LEFT,
THEN, IS OPENING
THE PRESENTS.



FOR FURY:

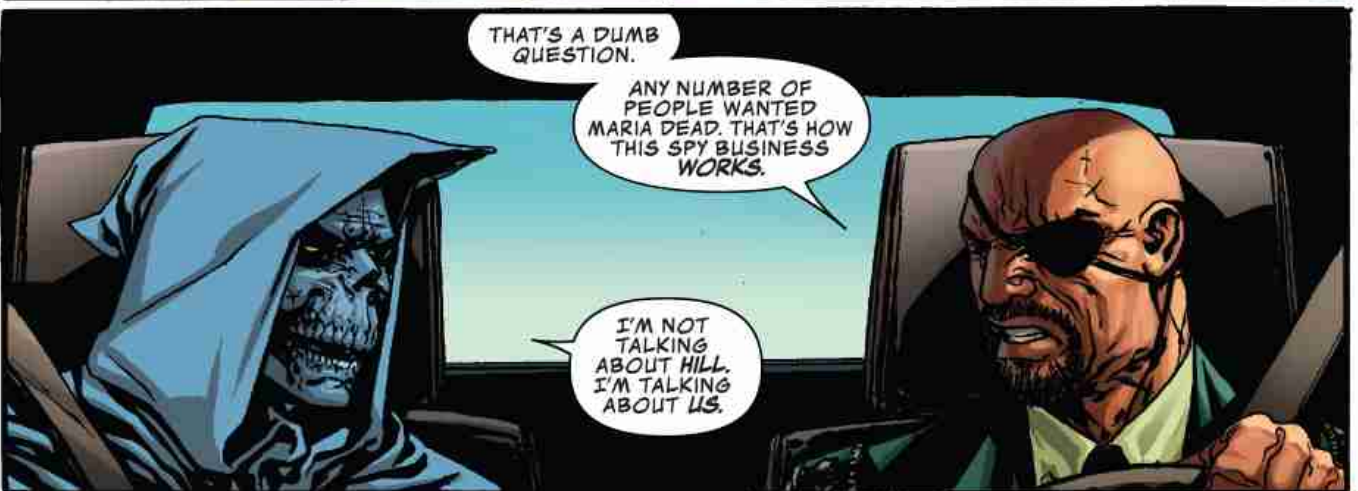
REVENGE.



FOR ME:

VINDICATION.







US?

I DON'T
REMEMBER
GIVING YOU MY
LETTERMAN
JACKET,
TASKMASTER.

LOOK,
RUBICON TRIGGER
IS THE ONLY LEAD
I HAVE. WE UNLOCK
IT, FIGURE OUT WHAT
IT IS, AND I CAN
USE THAT TO FIND
MARIA'S KILLER.



WHO PROFITS FROM US
UNLOCKING RUBICON
TRIGGER THOUGH?

YOU, ME,
THE WIDOW...WE'RE ALL
DANCING TO A TUNE. THIS
WHOLE THING WASN'T ABOUT
KILLING MARIA HILL. IT WAS
ABOUT PUTTING THE PIECES
ON THE BOARD TO GET WHAT
THEY WANT! OPENING UP
AN UNCRACKABLE
SYSTEM!



YOU SUPER-
SPIES ARE SO
USED TO BEING THE
ONES PULLING THE
STRINGS THAT YOU CAN'T
TELL WHEN THERE'S
SOMEONE ELSE
MAKING YOU
DANCE!



LISTEN, I'VE HAD
JUST ABOUT
ENOUGH--



AND ANOTHER THING.
BACK WHEN THIS
STARTED--

--YOU SAID
MARIA HILL MADE
YOU. MADE YOU
NICK FURY.

THAT'S
BULL.



BE VERY CAREFUL
WITH YOUR NEXT
WORDS,
TASKMASTER.

HILL MAY
HAVE TRAINED
YOU, TAUGHT YOU
ALL HER DIRTY
LITTLE
TRICKS...



...BUT DO YOU KNOW
WHEN EXACTLY IT WAS
YOU WENT FROM
"MARCUS JOHNSON,"
ARMY RANGER SCHMUCK,
TO "NICK FURY JR.,"
SUPERSPY?

FROM THE
NORMAL, SAFE,
BORING WORLD TO
THE ONE FILLED WITH
MONSTERS AND
MANIACS?



"IT WAS WHEN
YOU WENT TO
YOUR POOR DEAD
MOM'S HOUSE.

"AND YOU MET AN
HONEST-TO-GOD
SUPER VILLAIN FOR
THE FIRST TIME.

"HILL MADE
YOU? PFFT.
FACE IT, FURY..."



I
MADE
YOU.

YOU WANT TO
TAKE YOUR CHANCES
WITH THE WIDOW,
TASKMASTER? IS THAT
IT? BECAUSE
I CAN--

UH-OH.

GETTING
INTO IT
WITH FURY...

POW.

...I LOST TRACK
OF WHAT I SHOULD
HAVE BEEN
WATCHING OUT FOR.

THE
BLACK
WIDOW.

BOOM



BECAUSE
SHE'S A PRO.

THE MOMENT
YOU SLIP UP...

KRRNCHH

...THAT'S
WHEN SHE
GETS YOU.

KRRNCHH

DON'T WORRY
ABOUT YOUR
LITTLE FRIEND,
TASKMASTER.

FURY ONLY
DRIVES DECOMMED
S.H.I.E.L.D. VEHICLES.
OTHERWISE THAT
LITTLE I.E.D. WOULD
HAVE TURNED YOU BOTH
INTO THE FILLING OF A
STEEL AND GLASS
PIROSHKI.

FURY
WILL BE
FINE.
BUT YOU,
WELL...

A S.H.I.E.L.D.
TRUCK. RIGHT.

I KNOW HOW
THOSE WORK.
WHICH MEANS...

...YOU'VE
BEEN A DEAD
MAN SINCE YOU
PULLED THE
TRIGGER ON
MARIA HILL.

ALL THIS TIME
YOU'VE BEEN
WEARING THAT
RIDICULOUS
SKULL...

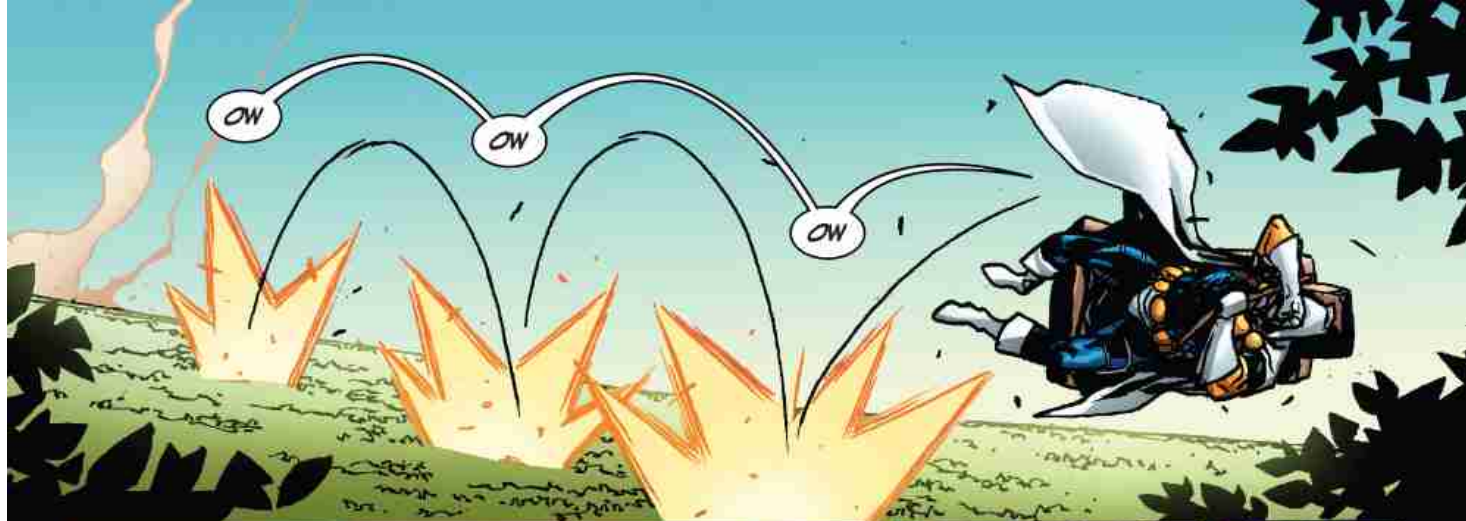
...NOW
IT'S FINALLY
APPROPRIATE.

YEAH,
WELL...

...EVERYONE'S
A CRITIC.

YOU
PIECE
OF--

WHOOOSH





IT'S NOT MY
FABULOUS
FIGHTING
ABILITIES.

(WHICH, INCIDENTALLY,
ALSO MAKE ME AN
INTERNATIONALLY
RANKED COMPETITIVE
BALLROOM DANCER.)

NO.



IT'S
COWARDICE.



I'M ONE OF
THE ONLY GUYS
AT MY LEVEL IN
THIS GAME WHO
KNOWS WHEN TO
CUT AND RUN.



SURE, I CAN
OUTFIGHT ALMOST
ANYONE.

THAT'S WHAT GIVES
ME THE EDGE ON
GUYS OUTSIDE OF MY
WEIGHT CLASS, THE
GUYS WITH POWERS.



THEY HAVE ALL THAT
POWER BUT DON'T
KNOW HOW TO FIGHT.

THEY LET THEIR
SUPER-STRENGTH OR
LASER EYES DO ALL
THE WORK FOR THEM.
THEY GET LAZY.



BUT THE
BLACK WIDOW
IS DIFFERENT.

SHE'S THE END PRODUCT
OF DEPARTMENT X, THE
RED ROOM. A HALF-
CENTURY-LONG PROJECT
TO BUILD A SUPERHUMAN
ASSASSIN CAPABLE OF
KILLING CAPTAIN AMERICA.



THEY BUILT HER
STRONG. THEY
BUILT HER FAST.

WAH!



AND SHE
KNOWS HOW
TO FIGHT.

AND UNLIKE HAN
OR OKOYE--HELL,
EVEN HYPERION--

--SHE
WANTS TO
KILL ME.



I'VE GOT NO PREP,
NO PLANS, NO DIRTY
LITTLE TRICKS UP
MY SLEEVE.

MY EARS ARE STILL
RINGING FROM MY CAR
BEING BLOWN UP. I'M STILL
SORE FROM FIGHTING IN
KOREA, IN WAKANDA.

BUT WORST
OF ALL:
SHE CAN'T
DIE.



I SAW CAPTAIN
AMERICA KILL
HER DURING
THE WHOLE
HYDRA THING.

KILLED HER
DEAD. BROKE
HER NECK.



BUT
HERE
SHE IS.



AND
HERE
I AM.

WHUDD



AND
HERE WE
ARE.



AT THE
END OF IT.

RRRAASHHH!

KRAKK



GOT
PLENTY...HUFF!
PLENTY MORE
OF THAT FOR
YOU.

MAYBE.
BUT
NOT NEARLY
ENOUGH.





I CAN READ A FIGHT
LIKE YOU COULD READ
THE FUNNY PAGES.



AND THIS
ONE TELLS
ME...

SHUNK



I'M GOING
TO DIE HERE.



WITHOUT EVER
KNOWING WHO
FRAMED ME.



"...IT ALWAYS SEEMS
THAT ALL THEY'RE
WAITING FOR IS ONE
DEAD WOMAN TO
MOTIVATE THEM..."



THE PIECES
ARE ALL
THERE...



"...BUT MARK
MY WORDS.
SOMEONE'S
PLAYING ME..."



...ALL
RIGHT
THERE...



...WHO
PROFITS FROM
US UNLOCKING
RUBICON
TRIGGER
THOUGH?"

NICK.
COME ON,
LET'S GO.

WHUH...

...ALMOST
GOT IT...

NO.

NO.

GOOD NIGHT,
TASKMASTER.

...SHE DID
WHATEVER SHE
NEEDED TO DO TO
GET THE JOB
DONE.

I LOVED
HER FOR
THAT.



**FURY
SAFE HOUSE
GAMMA.**
Later.

RUBICON
TRIGGER.

IT WAS A H.A.M.M.E.R.
PROJECT FROM
THOSE BAD OLD
DAYS.

A DOOMSDAY WEAPON--
A LITERAL HAMMER THAT
OSBORN COULD HAVE
HELD OVER THE WORLD
TO SECURE HIS
POSITION.

A HAMMER
HE COULD HAVE
USED TO CRACK
THE WORLD OPEN
LIKE A SKULL.

BUT?

BUT THE
SIEGE OF ASGARD
HAPPENED. AND
BEFORE HE HAD THE
CHANCE TO ACTIVATE
RUBICON TRIGGER,
HE HAD LOST.

NORMALLY,
THAT WOULD
BE THAT.

BUT RUBICON
TRIGGER, MUCH
LIKE OSBORN HIMSELF,
WASN'T THAT EASY TO
GET RID OF. LIKE
TOXIC WASTE.

STEALTH
DEATH-SPORE
SATELLITES--A
NECKLACE OF DEATH
HUNG AROUND THE
WORLD. IMPOSSIBLE
TO FIND.

SO THE "GOOD
GUYS" COULDN'T
FIND THE WEAPON.
BUT YOU HAD ACCESS
TO THE SYSTEM
INTERFACE.

EVEN WITH ALL OF
S.H.I.E.L.D. BEHIND ME AT
THE TIME, THE BEST WE
COULD DO WAS LOCK IT
WITH THOSE SIGNATURES
SO THAT NO ONE
WOULD BE ABLE TO
USE IT.

ALMOST
NO ONE.

LOOK, YOU STILL
HAVEN'T TOLD US
HOW YOU FAKED
YOUR DEATH--

"HOW"?

"HOW" IS
FOR THE RUBES,
NICK. YOU KNOW
WHO I AM, WHAT
I CAN DO. "HOW"
DOESN'T MATTER.
WHAT MATTERS
IS WHY.





THAT'S
IT?

FINE.
WHATEVER. I'LL
STRUT MY STUFF,
LET'S OPEN THIS
THING UP.

KINESIC
SIGNATURE
ACCEPTED:
PHIL COULSON.



THE GOOD
GUYS GET WHAT THEY
WANT. AND NAUGHTY
OLD TASKMASTER--
COWARDLY, SPITEFUL,
BULLYING TASKMASTER--
GETS PLAYED FOR
A CHUMP.

KINESIC SIGNATURE
ACCEPTED: AMI HAN.



I AM A COWARD,
AND I AM SPITEFUL,
AND I AM A BULLY.

KINESIC
SIGNATURE
ACCEPTED:
OKOYE.



BUT I'M
NOBODY'S
CHUMP.

WELCOME TO
RUBICON TRIGGER,
DIRECTOR
OSBORN.

I'M GOING
TO FEED YOU
THE KILL CODE,
GET READY TO
ENTER IT--



NO.

RUBICON
TRIGGER:
ACTIVATE.



I'M A
BASTARD.

ACTIVATING RUBICON TRIGGER.
COMMENCING ORBITAL STRIKE
IN 60 SECONDS.

RELAX.

...IT'S
COUNTING
DOWN, IT'S
COUNTING
DOWN...

THEY'LL
SAVE THE
DAY.

THEY
ALWAYS
DO.

...GET OUT
OF THE WAY! I
NEED TO ENTER
THE CODE
BEFORE--

BUT
IT'S ABOUT
TIME...

HURRY
UP--

...THAT THEY
REMEMBERED
WHO THEY'RE
DEALING WITH.

--GOING
TO KILL HIM.
WAIT...

WHERE DID
TASKMASTER
GO?

NEED A
BASTARD?

CALL
TASKMASTER.

THE END.

NEXT ISSUE

WELL, TRUE BELIEVER, THE RUBICONS ARE ALL TRIGGERED, THE TASKS ARE ALL MASTERED AND THE DEAD HAVE RISEN AGAIN. IN OTHER WORDS, WE'VE REACHED THE END OF OUR TALE. BUT KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON THAT TONY MASTERS-- IT'S NOT THE LAST YOU'VE SEEN OF HIM.

FOR MORE FROM MASTER SCRIBE JED MACKAY, BE SURE TO CHECK OUT THE UPCOMING *BLACK CAT #4* AND *AVENGERS MECH STRIKE #3*! AND FOR MORE OF THAT SWEET, SWEET ALESSANDRO VITTI ART, PICK UP THE NEW ARC OF *THOR*, STARTING WITH JUNE'S ISSUE #15!



BLACK CAT #4



AVENGERS MECH STRIKE #3

